United Nations

A/52/PV.23

General Assembly

Fifty-second Session

Official Records

23rd plenary meeting
Friday, 3 October 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko ..... (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: The first speaker is the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Oman, His Excellency Mr. Yousef Bin Al-Alawi Bin Abdulla, on whom I now call.

Mr. Abdulla (Oman) *(interpretation from Arabic):* Mr. President, at the outset allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election to preside over the work of this, the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. Your unanimous election reflects the active role of your country, Ukraine, with which my country, the Sultanate of Oman, enjoys relations of friendship and cooperation. We are fully confident that your diplomatic capabilities and skills will stand you in good stead in managing the work of the Assembly at its present session. My delegation assures you of its fullest cooperation in making this session a success and in achieving its desired objectives.

I would also like to pay special tribute to Ambassador Razali Ismail of friendly Malaysia for his successful and constructive efforts in steering the work of the General Assembly at its previous session.

By the same token, I wish to stress our continued support for the genuine efforts of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, in restructuring the United Nations and in revitalizing its role in all areas of endeavours.

Owing to the arbitrary policy of the current Israeli Government since it came to power in late May of last year, the peace process in the middle East is going through a difficult phase. The rigidity of the Israeli Government has manifested itself in the non-implementation of what had been agreed upon with the Palestinian National Authority in Oslo and in its non-recognition of the land-for-peace formula, a principle on which the whole of the Madrid Conference was built and a measure which was accepted by all the parties as a foundation for reaching a just and lasting peace.

Israel's failure to comply in good faith with its international commitments and its continuation of building settlements in occupied Arab Jerusalem and other occupied Palestinian territories have resulted in the disruption of the peace process. Therefore, we fully understand the awesome responsibility that falls on the two sponsors of the peace process. We are confident that they, as well as other peace-supporting nations, particularly those of the European Union, are capable of narrowing the existing chasm between the Government of Israel and the Government of the Palestinian National Authority on the basis of justice and equity that will produce substantial progress which will restore a climate of trust and cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian Governments and that will renew hope once more among the fraternal people of Palestine as well as among the people of Israel for life in peace and harmony.

97-86140 (E)

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My delegation wishes to recall that the status of Jerusalem was one of those issues that were agreed to be deferred to the final stage of negotiations. However, the measures being taken by the Israeli Government in Jerusalem and its vicinity totally run counter to what was agreed upon in Madrid in 1991.

We therefore call upon the international community to express solidarity with the Government of the Palestinian National Authority in resisting these Israeli policies which lead to more tension, violence and bloodshed.

Proceeding from its conviction of the importance of the peace process in the Middle East and the need to contribute to giving it impetus for further progress, my country, the Sultanate of Oman, has actively participated in supporting that process. It continues to adhere to the goals of establishing peace in the Middle East in accordance with the relevant resolutions and agreements which have been concluded. Therefore, we demand that those agreements be implemented, since peace is an imperative, and is in the interests of all peoples in the region, ridding them of all forms of repression, terror, poverty, and hunger.

The Sultanate of Oman reaffirms its solidarity with the fraternal people of Palestine and supports the peaceful position of the Government of the Palestinian National Authority, which aims at Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967.

We call upon the international community to enhance the peace process by providing its support to the Government of the Palestinian National Authority, both materially and psychologically, thus enabling it to establish the foundations for stability and security in the Palestinian territories and to build the necessary infrastructures for the Palestinian economy, which is an important factor that will safeguard what has been achieved and what we hope will be achieved in the future.

We also call upon the people of Israel and all political actors in that country to promote and defend the peace process. We also reject all forms of terror, repression and fear, which have had an adverse impact on the national interests of all the peoples in the region, including Israel itself.

We reaffirm the desire of Syria to establish a just and comprehensive peace, a desire it has always reiterated in all international forums. We support the Syrian position calling for the resumption of the negotiations with the current Israeli Government from where they ended with the previous Israeli Government, based on full and complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the boundaries prior to 4 June 1967, with the concomitant mutual obligations to guarantee the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace between Syria and Israel and in the region at large.

We would also like to reaffirm the importance of Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Lebanese territories to internationally recognized borders, in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978). The world has witnessed the increased tension between Israel and Lebanon over the past two years, which has inflicted tremendous financial losses on the Lebanese economy, not to mention the killing of innocent civilians and the spread of terror and destruction, which is a natural result of the continuation of Israel's occupation of a part of Lebanese territory.

The phenomena of violence and terrorism that target the lives of innocents require strengthened international efforts and a firmer will to stand against these heinous acts. In this regard, I reiterate my country's condemnation of these phenomena and its absolute rejection of all forms of violence and terrorism. We call on the international community to coordinate its efforts to put an end to these acts and to guarantee that those who commit or advocate such crimes be brought to justice.

With regard to the situation between the United Nations and Iraq, we believe that the implementation of resolution 986 (1995) and its further extension are important steps that deserve the acknowledgement and the commendation of the international community, for it will alleviate some of the sufferings endured by the brotherly people of Iraq. My country has welcomed this and expresses its satisfaction that the cooperation between Iraq and the Special Commission is being built on a foundation of trust that will certainly enable its new Chairman, Ambassador Richard Butler, to submit an appropriate final report on the future of the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq.

Despite these encouraging indicators between the United Nations and Iraq, some fundamental issues remain that have yet to register any progress, particularly the question of Kuwaiti prisoners and detainees of other nationalities, and the return of Kuwaiti properties. This question is of particular importance and we would reaffirm here the urgent need for the United Nations to make greater efforts and to establish further contacts with

Iraq with the aim of putting this issue to rest, since it is largely related to humanitarian and social matters.

My country attaches primary importance to the peace and security of the Gulf region, cooperation and coexistence among its nations and peoples in accordance with the principles of international law, peaceful neighbourly relations, mutual respect and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. On this understanding, we have been striving, in the context of the combined efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council, to solve all disputes and sources of tension, whatever they may be, between the countries of the region through dialogue and peaceful means. Thus, the question of Lesser Tunb, Greater Tunb and Abu Musa islands constitutes a dispute that might jeopardize the peace and stability which we are seeking. In this regard, we support all efforts aimed at solving this question through direct peaceful dialogue and legal means between the concerned parties, the United Arab Emirates and the Islamic Republic of Iran, in a manner that will safeguard neighbourly relations, stability, security and peace in the region.

With regard to the situation in Somalia, my country applauds the efforts recently made by Egypt that led to the signing of an agreement between the leaders of the Somali factions. We call on those factions to pursue the peace dialogue among them in order to attain Somali national unity. We call upon the United Nations to render concrete support to Egypt's efforts to help the Somali factions to implement their national programme.

My country has continuously supported international efforts aimed at strengthening international peace and security. In this regard, my country's announcement at the previous session of the General Assembly of its accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) emphasizes our policy, which was followed by other steps represented by its deposit of the instrument of ratification in early 1997 and its initiation of negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency to finalize a safeguards agreement, in accordance with our obligations as set down in the Treaty.

The Sultanate of Oman, while taking this historic step, certainly hopes to bestow more strength and credibility on the Treaty, which it considers to be the most important multilateral disarmament treaty, by encouraging all countries that have not yet joined the NPT to do so. In this regard, we call on Israel in particular to expedite its accession to the Treaty and to place all its nuclear facilities under international supervision, which we believe will create an atmosphere of trust and confidence and limit the level of armament in the Middle East — a move that would bring about just and permanent peace to the region.

The Chemical Weapon Convention is no doubt an important multilateral disarmament treaty prohibiting a whole category of weapons of mass destruction amenable to verification measures. All of us have an obligation to uphold these measures for the benefit and welfare of humanity at large. In order to avoid a similar fate for the NPT, we believe that all nations should accede to it. Preserving the universality and comprehensive nature of this Treaty should constitute one of the highest goals on the international community's list of priorities.

At a time when the international community is preparing to enter the twenty-first century, the African continent continues to suffer the blight of endless, successive wars. These wars have taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians and created more than 6 million refugees and about 12 million displaced persons in the continent.

We add our voice to those who have called on the African nations within areas of conflict to exert every possible effort, including regular negotiations, to provide an environment conducive to national reconciliation among the warring factions and to enable the refugees to return securely to their lands through safe passages.

My country supports the United Nations role in coordinating worldwide efforts — through international donor agencies, the regional efforts represented by the work of the Organization of African Unity, and countries that border those areas of conflict — aimed at achieving progress and development for the individual in Africa, who has and continues to suffer from deprivation, despair, poverty, natural disasters and other man-made catastrophes.

The environment is a gift from God, the Almighty, to man. Its preservation is a collective responsibility which is not limited by political boundaries. This fact has been proven repeatedly. Therefore, wherever man lives, he should do his share to protect the environment and to treat it with wisdom and logic, and be aware of the diverse causes of pollution. We are called upon to commit ourselves constantly to the implementation of Agenda 21 and its principles declared at the Earth Summit. Such actions and principles constitute the foundation upon which a global partnership and a

collective responsibility have been erected. Their goal is to end poverty and hunger and to prevent a decline in health standards and the degradation of environmental systems. All of these are necessary preconditions to obtaining sustainable development, which is the only option open to humanity that guarantees the future of coming generations and offers prosperity and progress to the present ones.

The Sultanate of Oman has prepared a national strategy to protect the environment that aims at achieving balanced and sustainable development, a strategy that would treat economic, social and environmental considerations on an equal footing. My country has also prepared a national plan to combat desertification in the Sultanate in due implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Furthermore, the Sultanate has established an integrated network of natural reserves throughout the country that will accord with the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Sultanate of Oman has supported various environmental bodies, introducing new legislation and updating old environmental laws in order to meet the requirements of environmental protection from the dangers of pollution resulting from diverse development activities with a view to guaranteeing the full implementation of regional and international environmental agreements. It has also declared every 8 January as Omani Day of the Environment.

On the regional level, the Sultanate of Oman, in its efforts to implement the recommendations that stem from the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping Wastes and Other Matter from ships at sea, has declared its intention to build a bunkering port for ships on its shores in preparation for their adoption in other countries of the Gulf region.

On the international level, the Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Preservation, set up by UNESCO, is a true testimony to the effort by the Sultanate of Oman and its leader to translate the concept of collective responsibility for environmental protection into a practical reality. Protecting the environment and striking a balance between the needs of development and the environment form a cornerstone of the declared policy of the Sultanate of Oman. My country looks forward to complementing its effort with that of the international community in the areas of training, transfer of technology and exchange of information and to getting acquainted with the latest modern techniques and scientific discoveries in the environmental field. In this regard, we call on the international community, in particular the developed countries, to provide the necessary financial and technical resources to rescue our planet and its natural resources.

Since the individual is the centre of development and the moving force behind the renaissance of modern Oman and is the real support of all development operations, the Sultanate of Oman, as of the inception of its modern development, has focused its attention on improving the welfare of Omani citizens.

In the social domain, the national plans for the development of the family and of women have been accorded the highest priority. Our social development plans accord special attention to issues relating to the family and to projects that aim at providing the best care for women and children. The efforts of the Government in this regard have culminated in the establishment of women's rehabilitation centres in different parts of the Sultanate. These centres aim to develop women's potential and to promote their cultural and social standing. Moreover, the Government has played its part by introducing new laws and legislation that are geared to achieve social security for the family in cases of old age, disability and handicap, in order to allow those with disabilities to be reintegrated in society and to rehabilitate them for participation in society's development.

The Government has also established development plans for women and children with a view to their preparation for the future through setting up women's organizations based on volunteerism and through launching children's social services in remote and rural areas of the country.

In this regard, we are happy to note that international agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), have praised the efforts of the Government. In its report entitled *The Progress of Nations 1997*, UNICEF illustrated the accomplishments achieved by the Sultanate of Oman in child protection and the country's commitment to ensuring the rights of the child through its accession in 1996 to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Sultanate of Oman is the number-one country in the world in terms of reducing infant under-five mortality by 74 per cent between 1980 and 1995. The report notes:

> "The proportion of children who reach their fifth birthday is one of the most fundamental indicators of a country's concern for its people. Child survival statistics are a poignant indicator of the priority given to the services that help a child to

flourish: adequate supplies of nutritious food, the availability of high-quality health care and easy access to safe water and sanitation facilities, as well as the family's overall economic condition and the health and status of women in the community." [See *The Progress of Nations 1997*, page 28]

The UNICEF report for the year 1994 also notes that, based on the 1992 indicators, the Sultanate of Oman ranked as the number-two nation in the Middle East and North Africa region in terms of girls' enrolment in primary education.

Recently, the achievement of modern development in the Sultanate of Oman has culminated in the significant achievement of the introduction of the Basic Law of the State, which is considered a milestone in the Sultanate's modern history. Other serious steps are also under way to strengthen the participation of women in the legislature, the Majlis Al-Shura.

On the economic level, achieving balance and stability in macroeconomics and encouraging private enterprise in a competitive and free environment constitute the future vision that will guide the Omani economy for the next 25 years.

We believe that the reaffirmation of the previously mentioned Basic Law of the State and the adherence to these principles will be the guiding factor in the country's policy of openness that should engender confidence in our economy and create the necessary conditions for investments.

In the area of diversifying the sources of its national revenue, the Sultanate of Oman is in the process of implementing several other major projects that are expected to capitalize on its natural gas discoveries and reserves. In this respect, we would like to note in particular that the liquefied natural gas project should begin operation with the first shipment in the year 2000. Work has also begun on building the container port in Raysút, in the south of the Sultanate, with a view to its becoming a regional and international port. It is our hope that this port will serve as a regional focal point for exporters and transitional trade.

In addition to these efforts, the Omani Government is in the process of implementing various privatization projects through careful study. It is also updating its tax and investment laws in accordance with the new spirit of global partnership prevailing throughout the world.

In accord with this global partnership, the Sultanate of Oman has adopted important measures to implement the necessary requirements for its membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO). It is our fervent hope that these measures will be finalized in order to allow Oman to assume its rightful place in the organization in the near future. Here I would like to recall that, in compliance with the guidelines of the WTO in the area of intellectual property, Oman has completed the formal procedures for becoming a member of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). In this vein, the Convention signed at Stockholm on 14 July 1967 has been in force in Oman as of 19 February 1997.

On the regional plane, the economic cooperation among the States members of the GCC is being strengthened every day. Moreover, there is agreement among them with regard to international treaties and organizations. The member States of the GCC are seriously striving to join the WTO. Coordination between the GCC and other regional and international economic groupings is something that ought to be noted here as well.

The Sultanate of Oman adheres to a free-market economy and vigorously promotes foreign investments. And in this regard, it has introduced various incentives, created the appropriate environment and enacted flexible legislation in order to eliminate all the barriers and impediments that might stand in the way of attracting foreign investors and protecting their rights.

Based on this conviction, given our national economic strategies and in response to international developments that attest to the importance of economic groupings, the Sultanate of Oman participated in the first Ministerial Meeting for the formal launching of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) which was held in Mauritius in March 1997. As a result of many years' work, in which my country had the honour to initiate and take part in formative meetings, the Indian Ocean Rim Economic Association was officially established. This has paved the way for its members to work together towards strengthening economic and trade cooperation between them in one of the important regions of the world in accordance with the goals and objectives enshrined in the Association's charter. These goals include increasing economic linkages, cooperation and interdependence between the member States and their peoples. Besides working with the private and academic sector, members of the Indian Ocean Rim Economic Association are working towards

establishing stronger ties in the areas of technical and scientific cooperation and also promoting the exchange of investment opportunities and mutual economic benefits.

We welcome the national-level initiatives to set up programmes to pay arrears to the United Nations. The adoption of such measures will revitalize the work of the Organization in all areas, particularly in those areas relating to organization, administration and finance. This should strengthen the performance of the Organization in the years 1998 and 1999 in accordance with the practical framework established by the General Assembly. At the same time, we urge all States to refrain from setting conditions for the United Nations during the payment of their late dues. Such conditions ignore the will and interests of the international community, and are characterized as focusing entirely on short-term national interests of the States involved. Such conditions could lead to the further escalation of old and existing tensions in the world, until appropriate solutions for their radical elimination are found. Here we advocate caution and deliberateness in connection with the elimination of some of the United Nations missions — such as the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, presently stationed in Jerusalem, and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. These cutbacks might have negative political and legal implications.

Through the United Nations the international community has proved its ability to renew its determination and muster the necessary political will for serious collective work and cooperation in fostering international peace and security. In this regard the Organization has shouldered huge responsibilities and faced complex challenges in its efforts to restructure its system for the next millennium through the adoption of less costly and more effective mechanisms for attaining the desired goals.

In our view, after all the debates and deliberations in the General Assembly, the time has now come to have a final vision of how to expand the Security Council and to restructure it, that Council being the most important political body charged with the maintenance of international peace and security. While bearing in mind the global economic and political realities, which cannot be ignored, the reforms should be of a holistic nature, based on equality among nations and equitable geographic distribution. There is also the need to establish democracy in the work and decision-making of the Security Council. The Council's work also encompasses the development of an actual and precise picture of the new international order, which should be characterized by justice, security and peace.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, His Excellency The Honourable Lakshman Kadirgamar, M.P.

Mr. Kadirgamar (Sri Lanka): May I begin, Sir, by extending to you our warm felicitations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly. Your long association with the United Nations as Ukraine's Permanent Representative and your diplomatic skills and accomplishments as your country's Foreign Minister undoubtedly, if I may say so, make you eminently suited for the task of guiding our deliberations this year.

We would like to place on record our deep appreciation for the achievements of your predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia. As President of the General Assembly last year he left an indelible mark in the annals of this institution by giving it bold and vigorous leadership at a time when far-reaching changes in the United Nations system are being undertaken.

I also wish to convey our warm greetings, and indeed a very special welcome, to the Secretary-General as he participates in this, his first General Assembly debate since he became the chief executive of our Organization. He has, in a very short time, developed and launched a far-reaching programme of reforms, which is undoubtedly the most comprehensive undertaken in the 52-year history of the Organization. We pledge our fullest cooperation to him in his arduous work. We pledge to make a positive response to his initiative for reform.

This year the General Assembly is preoccupied — and very rightly so — with the question of reform. It is no doubt an important question, a question on which all delegations have a view. Indeed, there are many conflicting views on the subject. My Government also has a view, one that it shares with a large number of delegations, especially those of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement. I will in a moment make my brief observations on the question of reform.

But this year I wish to devote my address to the General Assembly, in the main, to a different theme. I wish to place before the delegations here assembled, fairly and squarely, and to plead fervently, a cause to which my Government is deeply committed and for which it has deep concern. It is a cause that deserves the

strong support of all Governments and all the peoples of the world. It is a cause that challenges the conscience of mankind. It is a cause that cries out for redress, for immediate, concerted, vigorous action. It is the cause of the innocent, helpless victims of war. More specifically, my theme is the impact of armed conflict on children: a subject that in the experience of Sri Lanka is drenched in blood and tears. I will return to my theme in a moment. But first, the question of reform.

Although 1997 is often referred to as the year of reform, we would prefer it to be remembered as the year of renewal and reform. Reform by itself is no substitute for empowering the United Nations. Renewal of the spirit of multilateralism enshrined in the Charter is an essential corollary to the reform exercise launched by the Secretary-General. If reform is to be conceptually sound and capable of effective implementation, it must command in the fullest sense consensus in the General Assembly.

Sri Lanka certainly shares the vision of the Secretary-General to make the United Nations a dynamic and cost-effective institution responsive to the challenges of our day and age. We recognize the necessity for reorganizing the Secretariat, the consolidation of United Nations activities into core areas, the creation of a senior management group, and the coordination of United Nations field activities as a manifestation of sound principles of good management. The creation of a United Nations Development Group that would consolidate and coordinate the activities of a variety of bodies is another proposal that merits close attention. We endorse the measures to strengthen the United Nations operational capacity to combat drugs, crime and terrorism by bringing together disparate international efforts under a single dedicated organization.

Sri Lanka shares with many other delegations the disappointment that consensus has so far eluded our efforts to expand the Security Council. The General Assembly's Open-ended Working Group on this issue has been deliberating since 1994 with very little progress accomplished, which is itself evidence of the contentious nature of the question. Sri Lanka was one of the 10 countries that brought the question of equitable representation and increase in the membership of the Security Council to the General Assembly agenda in 1979. Many Member States have consistently demanded that the composition of the Security Council should be broadened and that its working methods should be rendered transparent. The Council cannot remain structurally fossilized and anachronistic in a world of dynamic change.

We are pleased to note that the need for change is now being widely recognized. In order to be credible, viable and successful, reform of the Security Council should prudently take into account the interests clearly set forth by the non-aligned nations. We are pleased to note that the United States of America has now agreed that an expanded Security Council should contain three representatives of the developing countries as permanent members.

We agree with the Secretary-General's proposal that there should be a dedicated locus for the United Nations operational activities against crime and terrorism. United Nations action against terrorism can no longer be confined to rhetorical statements and exhortations. We therefore endorse the Secretary- General's timely proposal to place United Nations action to combat crime and terrorism in an operational mode.

There is convincing evidence that civil society and the rule of law are increasingly threatened by transnational networking in illicit arms, terrorism, narcotics, money-laundering and crime. The former Secretary-General rightly described this phenomenon as a "supra-national subversive threat" to peace and stability. The present Secretary-General has correctly focused on the fact that underworld groups and terrorists have mastered the abuse of technology and the globalized information network to propagate their sinister designs. Their misuse and abuse of modern technology have vastly increased the power and influence of these criminal groups, which pose a massive threat to law and order, democratic political institutions and economic activities within and between nations.

It should be a priority on the international agenda that effective measures be taken to control, if not eliminate, these pernicious elements. We agree with the recommendation that a redoubling of efforts involving new partnerships among national and international agencies will be needed to achieve this objective. It is to be emphasized that there should be coordination between the merged focal points on crime, drugs and terrorism and the United Nations department handling the flow of small arms and the illicit arms trade.

We also hope that the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on an International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, of which Sri Lanka is a Vice-Chairman, will conclude its negotiations and submit a text for adoption at this session. Thereafter, we urge the international community, especially the large and

powerful nations, to update their domestic legislation so as to arm themselves with adequate legislative authority to eradicate the fund-raising and other activities which take place on their soil in support of terrorist activities that take place on the soil of other States. Today terrorism is a phenomenon with international ramifications. Only well-organized, well-coordinated international action can combat international terrorism effectively.

I turn now to the question of human rights. The delicate and complex process of protecting and promoting human rights, good governance and accountability in an environment of underdevelopment, violence and terrorism is one that should be carefully developed and resolutely moved forward. The Declaration of Human Rights is universal and unalterable. Sri Lanka does not believe that the Declaration should be diluted, modified or ignored. What we believe, and strongly advocate, is that international action to enforce human rights should be fair and even-handed. Human rights should never be used by powerful States to bludgeon and bully weaker States for spurious political reasons. The essence of peace and development is that each human being should be enabled to enjoy "better standards of life in larger freedom".

Undeterred by the extraordinary security problems posed by terrorism and the threats levelled against the democratic traditions and institutions of Sri Lanka, we have been able to make much headway in the promotion and protection of human rights in our country. Sri Lanka is now a party to 13 international human rights instruments. At the risk of exposing itself to tendentious propaganda by terrorist groups, the Government has taken a number of national and international measures on a broad front, to pursue an open policy on human rights in accordance with international norms. We have established a national Human Rights Commission, which is an independent organization with investigative, monitoring and advisory powers. The Commission is now functional and is in touch with regional and international institutions including the United Nations Centre for Human Rights.

I am also pleased to mention that I have today, just a short while ago, deposited with the Secretary-General Sri Lanka's instrument of accession to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This important decision to permit international scrutiny of governmental actions affecting the human rights of our citizens is consistent with our policy of openness on human rights.

Sri Lanka warmly welcomes the appointment of Mary Robinson as the new High Commissioner for Human Rights. I had the pleasure of discussing human rights issues with her a few days ago. I am confident that she will bring to her task an open mind and a fair approach; that she will seek and promote informed dialogue, not confrontation; that she will strive to win the trust of developing countries; and that she will not apply double standards nor wield human rights concerns as a weapon against them. We wish her every success as she assumes her important duties. She may rest assured that she will receive from Sri Lanka the fullest cooperation.

I have now reached the central theme of my address: the impact of armed conflict on children. Every year the United Nations builds a mountain of paper: according to the British Foreign Secretary, 2,500 tons of paper are produced annually at a cost of $150 million. At this time of year, every year, the General Assembly is engulfed by a flood of words that rises to new heights as the membership of our Organization grows in number. There is much waste, much repetition, much verbiage in our methods of work. But we must always remember that within this pile of papers there are some documents which deserve — which require — the closest attention of the international community.

One such document, outstanding for its sweep, its depth and the careful research that went into its preparation is the study on the impact of armed conflict on children compiled by Ms. Graça Machel and her collaborators and submitted to the General Assembly last year under the symbols A/51/306 and A/51/306/Add.1. It is a document so profound in its impact, so searing in the revelations it makes of matters that the world little understands that to ignore it would be a permanent rebuke to the collective conscience of mankind.

The study exposes the plight of children as the victims of armed conflict. It covers the agonizing situation of children as refugees, as objects of exploitation and gender-based violence and above all as child soldiers. The study recommends measures for the rehabilitation and reconciliation of children affected by war, for promoting their psychological recovery and social integration, for their education and for dealing with a number of other questions relevant to the problem of mitigating the impact of war on children. The study points out that millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders but targets. Some fall victim to a general onslaught against civilians; others die as part of a calculated genocide. Still

other children suffer the effects of sexual violence or the multiple deprivations of armed conflict that expose them to hunger or disease. Just as shocking, thousands of young children are cynically exploited as combatants.

In 1995, according to the study, 30 major conflicts raged in different locations around the world. All of them took place within States, between factions split along ethnic, religious or cultural lines. The conflict destroyed crops, places of worship and schools. Nothing was spared, held sacred or protected: not children, not families, not communities. In the past decade, an estimated two million children have been killed in armed conflict. Three times as many have been seriously injured or permanently disabled. Countless others have been forced to witness or even take part in horrifying acts of violence. These statistics are shocking enough, but more chilling, says the study, is the conclusion to be drawn from them: that more and more of the world is being sucked into a desolate moral vacuum. This is a space devoid of the most basic human values; a space in which children are slaughtered, raped and maimed; a space in which children are exploited as soldiers; a space in which children are starved and exposed to extreme brutality. Unregulated terror and violence speak of deliberate victimization. There are few further depths to which humanity could sink.

Ms. Machel pleads that whatever the causes of modern-day brutalities towards children, the time has come to call a halt. I make the same plea to the General Assembly today. The study exposes the extent of the problem and proposes many practical ways to pull back from the brink. Its most fundamental demand is that children simply have no part in warfare. The international community must denounce this attack on children for what it is: intolerable and unacceptable.

Violent conflict has always made victims of non-combatants. The patterns and characteristics of contemporary armed conflicts, however, have increased the risks for children. The personalization of power and leadership and the manipulation of ethnicity and religion to serve personal or narrow group interests have had similarly debilitating effects on countries in conflict. Armed conflicts across and between communities result in massive levels of destruction: physical, human, moral, cultural. Not only are large numbers of children killed and injured, but countless others grow up deprived of their material and emotional needs, including the structures that give meaning to social and cultural life. The entire fabric of their societies — their homes, schools, health systems and religious institutions — are torn to pieces.

The Machel study rightly points out that war violates every right of a child: the right to life, the right to be with family and community, the right to health, the right to the development of the personality and the right to be nurtured and protected. Many of today's conflicts last the whole length of a childhood, meaning that from birth to early adulthood, many children will experience multiple and cumulative assaults.

Against the background I have outlined, I wish to focus sharply on the terrible plight of child soldiers. The Machel study has pointed out that one of the most alarming trends in armed conflict is the participation of children as soldiers. Children serve armies in supporting roles, as cooks, porters, messengers and spies. Increasingly, however, adults are deliberately conscripting children as soldiers. Some commanders have even noted the desirability of using child soldiers in war because they are

> "'more obedient, do not question orders and are easier to manipulate than adult soldiers'". [A/51/306, para. 34]

A series of 24 case studies on the use of children as soldiers prepared for the Machel study, covering conflicts over the past 30 years, indicates that Government or rebel armies around the world have recruited tens of thousands of children. Many child soldiers are 10 years of age or younger. While the majority are boys, girls also are recruited. The children most likely to become soldiers are those from impoverished and marginalized backgrounds and those who have become separated from their families.

In Sri Lanka we know exactly what the Machel study is talking about. We have for almost two decades been in the grip of a war being fought against the State by a group of heavily armed terrorists known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and internationally known as one of the deadliest terrorist organizations the world has ever seen. It is fighting to create a separate State in Sri Lanka by force of arms. Last July the Senate of the United States unanimously concluded that the LTTE is a terrorist organization and requested the State Department to declare it to be so. Last August a Canadian court declared the LTTE to be a terrorist organization and ordered the deportation of its chief fund-raiser in Canada.

The LTTE has killed thousands of unarmed civilians and has destroyed public property worth millions of

dollars. In January last year it bombed and destroyed the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, killing hundreds of civilians, and in July last year it bombed a rush-hour commuter train full of workers going home, again killing hundreds of civilians. These are but a few of the atrocities the LTTE has committed against civilians in the course of a long campaign of terror. Only a few months ago it killed two of our Members of Parliament, adding to the large tally of politicians and other leaders murdered by the LTTE over the years, including a President of Sri Lanka and a Prime Minister of India. Recently the LTTE attacked international civilian shipping that provides essential services and supplies to the Tamil community in the north of Sri Lanka, the very community on whose behalf it claims to be fighting.

The LTTE has conscripted thousands of teenage children to fight its war. Involving children as soldiers has been made easier by the proliferation of inexpensive light weapons. But the LTTE is committing more dastardly and more heinous crimes against Tamil children. It brazenly kidnaps them or lures them to its cause by glorifying and romanticizing war. They are brainwashed into believing in the cult of martyrdom. They swear fanatical allegiance to the leader. The Machel study identified Sri Lanka as one of the countries where children are being lured into "cults of martyrdom" [A/51/306, para. 43] by the "ideological indoctrination" [ibid.] of the LTTE. A book entitled *Children, the Invisible Soldiers*, released by the Save the Children organization in Stockholm, has condemned the use of children in suicide attacks by the LTTE. The international news agency IPS reported last May that

> "as adults are killed, up to half the fighters of the LTTE are children, many among them girls".

In another recent study, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women has strongly condemned the use of women in war by the LTTE.

Many of these children, boys and girls, are no more than 10 years of age. Many of them are transformed into suicide bombers. They wear cyanide capsules around their necks. They are hurled into battle as human bombs. The Machel study itself has observed, with specific reference to Sri Lanka, that

> "adults have used young people's immaturity to their own advantage, recruiting and training adolescents for suicide bombings." [ibid.]

A recent press report on fighting in the north of Sri Lanka noted that

> "young boys barely in their teens are blindfolded and escorted by a woman Tiger cadre to the battlefield, in groups of eight to 10, their blindfolds removed and they are ordered to fire at troops".

In December 1995 the former United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) representative in Sri Lanka said in a press release

> "The LTTE recruits boys and girls from the age of 10 upwards. Their dependence on child combatants is increasing rapidly."

The Machel study has referred to the role which international organizations, non-governmental organizations, religious groups and civil society in general can play in preventing this diabolical practice. It is indeed a matter of great regret that in my own country, despite the notorious prevalence of the LTTE practice of recruiting children as fighters, these organizations, which are often quite vocal in their pleas for peace and swift to castigate excesses on the part of the armed forces, have remained strangely silent on this issue. By their failure to condemn such acts, they are surely guilty of a grave dereliction of the duty to uphold the moral and spiritual values of a civilized society. By their silence it would appear that they are oblivious to the immense tragedy of a whole generation of young lives being sacrificed to Moloch, while a misguided few applaud the helpless victims as martyrs, and yet others seek to romanticize the so-called liberation of girls who have hitherto been brought up in a long-respected traditional mode, caring nought for the dehumanization that is involved.

I strongly urge the international community to take action on the lines suggested in paragraph 62 of the Machel study. These recommendations envisage a global campaign aimed at eradicating the use of children under the age of 18 years in armed conflict and the public exposure of such practices by the media, creating international pressure against those who resort to them. I also urge strict adherence to the Convention on the Rights of the Child by all actors in armed conflicts, and I stress the need for specific measures to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers into society and the need for early action to conclude the drafting of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in regard to the involvement of children in armed conflicts

and the prohibition of recruitment of children under the age of 18.

We reject the complacent assumption made by some that the involvement of children in armed conflict is inevitable and unavoidable. This is clearly not the case. Their participation is the result of heartless, deliberate and calculated decisions made by ruthless men, regardless of the loss of innocent lives, relentlessly pursuing their megalomaniac ambitions. The leader of the LTTE, while sending to their deaths thousands of young children — the youngest of the young — brings up his own children in comfort and safety, far from the battlefields, far away from the country itself. This barbaric practice of conscripting or luring children for war must be condemned by all civilized States, without any room for equivocation or doubt, and must be eliminated from our world if we are to preserve our humanity.

I appeal to the affluent countries in which the LTTE has established offices and raises funds to prosecute its infamous war in Sri Lanka not to tolerate its presence or give it shelter when it engages in the commission of dastardly crimes against children — indeed, the children of its own community.

On behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka, I greatly welcome the appointment of a distinguished Ugandan diplomat, Mr. Olara Otunnu, as the Secretary-General's Special Representative to study the impact of armed conflict on children. His appointment has also been welcomed by Canada. The Canadian Foreign Minister also referred to and condemned the recruitment of children as soldiers. We must give our wholehearted support to Mr. Otunnu. He intends to propose and initiate concrete measures to tackle the problem. He will launch a campaign of public advocacy to bring to the notice of the world the terrible plight of children in war. I appeal to the international community not to allow his work to suffer for lack of funds.

As we look back at the half century that has elapsed since the founding of the United Nations, we have, in truth, to acknowledge a sense of satisfaction at what has been achieved, however limited in scope, through our collective decisions and actions during that period. There have been undeniable gains in the spheres of economic and social development, however modest they appear to be when measured against our aspirations and objectives. Yet the fundamental problems of the developing world remain unresolved, while the developed countries have gone from strength to strength.

In the sphere of collective security and the maintenance of world peace, although major catastrophes have been averted, the United Nations has not succeeded in making real the dream of every human being to live in peace in a world free from the pestilence of war and all the attendant horrors of human carnage and the senseless destruction of everything we hold dear. Even the end of the cold war has made no great difference to countries such as ours embroiled in internal civil conflicts, all too often nourished by the giant armament manufacturers of the world, while the United Nations endlessly debates disarmament.

However deep our sense of disappointment and disenchantment may be, have we any hope apart from the United Nations? I do not think we have. If the United Nations has fallen short of our expectations, it is because we, the Member States, have failed to honour our obligations and fulfil our responsibilities to the world community, selfishly placing our national interests above the common good.

If we continue in this fashion the United Nations will cease to be relevant altogether, and history will surely record it as yet another pious venture which we did not have the courage and commitment to make real.

As the German Foreign Minister said from this podium a few days ago,

> "it is on our children, the weakest members of any society ... that the world's future and hopes depend ... They are little people who need big rights. How much worse off would they be if there were no United Nations? What would become of the world's conscience? Who would demand consideration for and solidarity with such children if we allowed this Organization to decline?" [See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-Second Session, Plenary Meetings*, 9th Meeting]

In order to realize the ideals of the founders of this world body, and the hopes and dreams of countless millions of people who look to the United Nations for their realization, we need to renew our faith and trust in the United Nations — not in the old United Nations, which is looked upon with cynicism, even suspicion, but in a United Nations that will, in a sense, be a new creation and a new being. But for the United Nations to be born anew we need to bring about fundamental structural changes in the international order, changes that will give it new life and strength for the coming century.

These changes will entail sacrifice; they will be changes which many States will hesitate to welcome and be reluctant to accept lest they endanger their sovereignty and their so-called vital interests. Nevertheless, such change will be in the nature of an uncompromising demand that will confront us all. Nothing worthwhile can be achieved without sacrifice. That is indeed a universal truth concerning human redemption, and the United Nations is, after all, like any other human institution. Its weaknesses and strengths are those of humankind.

The obligation to act in the common interest cannot be undertaken selectively; nor does the assumption of this onerous duty admit of any double standard. All the nations of the world, the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor, must jointly agree to curtail their independence and their claims to act unilaterally. Each must agree to subordinate its individual decision and discretion to a global political will, manifested through truly democratic and representative organs of the United Nations, reflecting the authentic judgement of the world community of States. Apart from, or bereft of, the collective decisions and concerted acts of such a reformed and restructured United Nations, carried into effect resolutely and with determination, I doubt whether we can honestly expect a better future for humankind in the new millennium. We must not fail the United Nations, or else we shall assuredly go down in history as "the hollow men" of the twentieth century.

Programme of work

The President in the Chair.

The President: I should like to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/INF/52/3, which contains a tentative programme of work and schedule of plenary meetings for the month of October and which is now being distributed in the Hall.

I should like to point out that this schedule was prepared to facilitate the organization of the work of delegations and to help ensure that the relevant documentation is ready for the discussion of the respective items. The lists of speakers for all the items listed in document A/INF/52/3 are now open.

I will, in due course, announce the dates for the consideration of other agenda items, as well as keep the Assembly informed of any additions or changes.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, His Excellency Mr. Seyoum Mesfin.

Mr. Mesfin (Ethiopia): I wish first of all to congratulate you, Sir, on your unanimous election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. There is no doubt that your election to this high position is an acknowledgment of your personal competence and of the commitment of your country, Ukraine, to the United Nations and to the principles enshrined in its Charter.

I also wish to pay tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador Razali, who discharged his responsibilities with great wisdom and dedication.

Our appreciation also goes to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the great efforts he is making to ensure the revitalization of the United Nations. In his report (A/51/950) to the Assembly entitled "Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform", the Secretary-General has proposed measures that Member States may take to democratize the United Nations and to enhance its effectiveness as an instrument with which to deal with the challenges facing us as we enter the twenty-first century. I wish to assure the Secretary-General of Ethiopia's full support for his initiative.

Ethiopia strongly believes that the reform and expansion of the Security Council, which is long overdue, is at the heart of the United Nations reform process. Broad consensus has been established that the reform and expansion of the Council must reflect the realities of the world we live in today. The African position on the issue was articulated at the thirty-third Summit of the Heads of State or Government of the member States of the Organization of African Unity, held in Harare in June this year. Ethiopia fully supports the African position.

This annual occasion affords us the opportunity to reiterate our commitment to the United Nations, to what it represents and to all efforts designed to address our common challenges.

Mr. Ngo Quang Xuan (Viet Nam), Vice-President, took the Chair.

For obvious reasons, some of the common dangers we have faced have receded. The cold war, which by common consensus represented a threat to the very

survival of humanity, is more or less behind us. There should therefore be far greater opportunity today for effective international cooperation in many spheres, and especially for real and tangible steps towards the realization of genuine partnership in the fight against poverty and to enable those determined to remove the obstacles to their development to achieve their goals and fulfil the dreams and the hopes of their peoples.

Peace and security can hardly be made durable and sustainable when conditions faced by the majority of peoples in the developing countries generate hopelessness and when deprivations suffered today are made all the more painful because existing trends, instead of providing consolation, promise more of the same, or worse. There is no more appropriate time than now, when we are preparing to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to renew our commitment and to rededicate ourselves to the realization of full respect of human rights in all their dimensions — civil, political, economic and social rights, including the right to development and to be free from the shackles of poverty.

For Ethiopia, the eradication of poverty and the promotion of human rights are the cornerstones of the country's development strategies and democratic reforms. In the immediate human rights programme, the Federal Parliament plans to establish, as stipulated in the Ethiopian Federal Constitution, a national human rights commission and an ombudsman early next year.

I wish to take this opportunity to bring to the attention of this Assembly the fact that leading members of the repressive military regime that ruled Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s are being tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity. These public trials are the biggest since Nuremberg. However, Ethiopian courts have been denied the opportunity to bring to justice all the perpetrators of these crimes because many of those who should be tried in Ethiopia are given safe haven in other countries, in contravention of the provisions of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. We call on the States concerned to cooperate with Ethiopia and to take appropriate measures, in accordance with international humanitarian law, to ensure that those who are responsible for crimes against humanity are brought to justice.

International cooperation and the benefits that are drawn from it, whether through bilateral or multilateral means, cannot be a substitute for what individual countries must do to ensure that sustainable development is achieved and economic growth is realized. The responsibility to extricate our countries from the miseries of poverty, in the case of those of us to whom this applies, lies with us. Aid alone, whatever its nature or quantity, would not do, even if it were to be made available.

But it is critically important that the international economic environment evolve towards providing an even and level playing field, most particularly for those who, for various reasons — whether on account of their own mistakes or because of complex historical reasons, some of which are not of their own making — have stayed behind and have failed to put their countries on a track of sustainable development.

In this regard, we cannot but admit that not enough is being done, although much is said and promised. The old divisions might have been consigned irrevocably to the past, but we cannot pretend that, though we continue to talk about our common humanity and the common village we occupy, the other divisions in the world are being addressed, let alone bridged. It would suffice just to look at the situation of poverty in the world today and the lukewarm effort to combat and to eradicate it internationally. The prediction that the level of poverty will continue to grow in Africa is a challenge to the international community, as it is a reflection of the dire condition of the continent.

The need to ensure food security for all should by no means be an impossible task to achieve for the world we live in. Here as well, individual countries facing this problem have to assume their responsibility in the first instance, but the international community should also have a role to play, including in the fight against corruption — a disease which, as we all realize, has an international aspect in its grand dimension, and is therefore not amenable to solutions taken at the national level alone. We in Ethiopia have made important progress over the last few years in building the basis for food security for our peoples. But, as should be obvious, no guarantee can be secured on food security as long as production is totally dependent, as is the case in Ethiopia, on rain-fed agriculture and when for a variety of reasons the available water is not utilized for irrigation purposes.

It is in this connection that the equitable utilization of transboundary rivers becomes an issue that should be accorded the utmost urgency. Regional cooperation on international rivers will remain impossible if calculations based on a zero-sum outcome favouring one side or another govern the attitude of parties that could otherwise

objectively benefit from even-handed cooperation. With respect to the question of the Nile waters, which affects Ethiopia directly and regarding which there has been no effective cooperation among the riparians, we wish to call on those involved to commit themselves to real and genuine regional cooperation which is based on a win-win perspective, ensuring outcomes that are fair, equitable and just. A status quo which is unjust cannot endure; nor can it serve as a basis for building genuine cooperation.

We are fully aware that at the level of the United Nations, there have been a number of initiatives designed to help address the economic and social problems faced by developing countries and to mitigate the effects of poverty and the impact of those conditions hindering the realization of sustainable economic development. However, despite good intentions, their practical implementation has always been half-hearted and, at best, less than satisfactory and therefore a source of disappointment. This applies to the United Nations Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s, to the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF) and to other initiatives. It is our hope that the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa will not meet a similar fate.

This should not be regarded as criticism aimed at the United Nations. The Organization has no life and no activity of its own independent of Member States. It is we Member States that have not sufficiently seized the opportunity opened up by the end of the cold-war division of the world and the international tension engendered by that state of affairs.

Not only within the United Nations but in general, both in the bilateral and the multilateral areas, the international cooperation being made available to the developing world today is not commensurate with the challenges faced by those countries, nor does it do justice to the tremendous effort made by those countries, including many in Africa, to make their economies business-friendly.

A growing number of countries on our continent, including my own country, Ethiopia, have taken decisive measures to liberalize their economies, to cut Government spending, to institute sound macroeconomic policies and to enhance the role of the private sector and civil society. Because of these serious efforts at belt-tightening and monetary and fiscal discipline, there have been some encouraging developments over the past four years with regard to economic growth in a number of African countries, including Ethiopia. In my own country, for the first time in more than two decades, the economy has begun to grow, with a growth rate of over 10 per cent in gross domestic product having been achieved in 1996. The average rate of growth over the past five years has been over 7 per cent.

In the area of governance and democratization, there is little doubt that, despite some setbacks, we in Africa seem to have made substantial progress over the past seven or so years. These gains need to be consolidated and enriched at a pace that can realistically be sustained, in conformity with the principles of indigenous ownership.

On the other hand, it would be stating the obvious to say that our economies have been slated to go on operating in an international economic environment that is hardly friendly to growth and sustainable development. The obstacles are diverse, and they are the same ones as we have been reiterating in gatherings such as this and whenever other opportunities have presented themselves. The challenges we face involve market opportunities for our commodities, and they are also related to protectionism, unfavourable terms of trade and the difficulty associated with attracting a sufficient level of foreign direct investment. But most of all the challenges we face involve issues related to the debt overhang and to debt-servicing obligations. If there is one major impediment to the development of countries such as Ethiopia, that impediment must be identified as the debt overhang, which continues to necessitate the diversion of so many resources from productive activities that could otherwise have accelerated growth and development.

We cannot, of course, be oblivious to the many proposals for debt relief and to the number of positive, albeit inadequate, steps that have been taken in this regard. We recognize and appreciate the efforts made by the Group of 7, the latest being the steps taken and the promises made at the Lyon Summit and since most particularly the promise made in connection with debt-relief measures for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt.

But even then, we cannot ignore the irony and the paradox we encounter with respect to debt relief. More often than not, to qualify for some of these debt-relief measures countries are expected to fulfil and meet conditions that are not absorbable even by economies that are far more advanced.

There is little doubt that one of the key prerequisites for sustainable economic development is ownership of one's economic programme. However, the conditionalities that accompany debt- relief measures have been undermining ownership, thereby causing the loss of possibilities of adopting policies based on a realistic and appropriate assessment of local and specific conditions. Thus, those condemned to a huge debt overhang which has become unbearable are faced with a Hobson's choice: debt relief with renunciation of ownership, or ownership with no relief.

What we need in this day and age are genuine partnership and international cooperation based at least on commitments to a level playing field and to conditions that do not require those in the developing world to face impossible choices. We are indeed hopeful that some of the latest initiatives that countries are in the process of taking bilaterally and the emerging trends encouraging renewed focus on Africa, such as the ministerial-level meeting of the Security Council convened last week, will help to increase the international community's sensitivity to the development challenges of Africa.

Genuine partnership is required to make sustainable development a reality in Africa. We hope that the Secretary-General next his report to the Security Council and the General Assembly next February, will forward concrete recommendations that would spare us a repetition of past disappointments.

It may not always be appropriate to see an immediate causal link between poverty and lack of economic development, on the one hand, and conflict and lack of security, including terrorism, on the other. But there is little doubt that the despair, hopelessness and malaise engendered by poverty and economic and social difficulties provide the fuel for ensuring the degeneration into all-out fratricidal war of political frictions, whatever their sources, with consequent social breakdown and the implosion of societies. We have seen too many times that once societies have imploded and State institutions have disintegrated, picking up the pieces becomes extremely difficult and a nearly impossible task. Look at Somalia.

But even so, Africa has made some progress. The nightmare in Liberia is over, thanks to the immense sacrifices made by the members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). New hope is also generated by the demise of the Mobutu regime and by the entry onto the scene of the Democratic Republic of Congo, whose Government and people need the support and the solidarity of the international community and of the United Nations. Despite some setbacks in Burundi, the countries of the region and the facilitator, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, continue to persevere in their efforts to help bring about a resolution of the conflict in that country.

We are pleased and encouraged that the effort being made by Mr. James Baker in Western Sahara is showing some important progress, and we are hopeful that the day may not be too far off when it will be possible to hold a free and fair referendum in Western Sahara. I wish to associate myself with the Secretary- General in congratulating the parties to the conflict on the positive results they have achieved so far towards finding a durable solution to the conflict. In the same spirit, I would like to call on them to continue direct dialogue and to speed up the implementation of their agreements.

With respect to the situation in the Middle East, we are profoundly disappointed with the increasing complications that the peace process has encountered. It is our ardent hope that the confidence which had emerged earlier will be rekindled and that the troubled region will find durable peace on the basis of justice for those to whom it has been denied and security for all.

Apart from the conflict in southern Sudan, regarding which the member States of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have continued to provide their assistance for the peaceful resolution of the problem and the reversals of the gains in Sierra Leone and the Comoros, the major conflict in Africa which has remained intractable is the one the people of Somalia are facing. Here too, important progress has been made and the opportunities for making a real breakthrough have been created which the Somalis can ill afford to squander. The framework for such a breakthrough has been made possible by the creation of the National Salvation Council, which is now preparing to hold a national reconciliation conference soon.

We all recall how many resources were spent by the United Nations for peace in Somalia. Now, with a small fraction of the resources and the efforts deployed earlier by the United Nations, the international community can position itself to assist the realization of national reconciliation and peace in that war-torn country. The process of peacemaking in Somalia is at a very critical juncture. The international community and the United Nations should not keep their distance from the effort for peace in Somalia.

The IGAD countries are determined to see to it that this process succeeds. The support of the Organization of African Unity and of our partners has been indispensable in this exercise, particularly in connection with the effort to ensure that those like Mr. Hussein Aideed are brought on board the peace process. It is our firm view that no one should be allowed to preempt and scuttle this process, and the unequivocal support of the United Nations for the ongoing peace process spearheaded by IGAD is indeed critical at this stage.

We all recall how the proliferation of initiatives for peace in Somalia created complications in the past and how, as a result, it was difficult for the international community to speak with one voice for peace in that country. There is today a much improved situation which, however, needs to be maintained and consolidated, for which close coordination between the United Nations, OAU and the IGAD countries is an absolute necessity.

Since the countries of the region have been made by proximity to see no luxury in the continuing lack of central authority in that country, they have chosen to work on the basis of the maxim that a less than good Government is better than none at all in Somalia. The consequence of the absence of central authority in Somalia has been the growth of forces, including from outside the region, bent on ensuring that chaos is continued and even expanded in the country and in the region — all the more reason, therefore, for the United Nations and the international community to do more to help the countries of the region and IGAD succeed in the effort they are making for peace and national reconciliation in Somalia.

In this regard, I wish to pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the steps he has taken to revitalize the United Nations role in Somalia and for the initiative he has taken to find ways of maximizing the support of the international community and of the United Nations for the ongoing peace process in Somalia. It is our hope that the steps that will be taken on the basis of the recommendations of the Secretary-General's Envoy will ensure greater support of the international community for the IGAD peace initiative and bring about a more effective coordination between the external actors. We strongly believe that the Secretary-General's proposed trust fund for Somalia will go a long way towards providing support to the peace process.

In this connection, I wish also to mention the OAU/IGAD joint mission to Somalia scheduled to take place this month. The explicit aim of this joint mission is to make the Bossaso Reconciliation Conference comprehensive and all-inclusive by encouraging all parties to participate and to convey a clear and unequivocal message that no group has the veto power over peace in Somalia.

Our subregion, the Horn of Africa, has been one of the regions of the world most affected by the consequences of war. The damage inflicted has been immense. Our region needs a respite and a peaceful period to make up for the lost time. Because it is a region in which deadly and prolonged wars were conducted, weapons are easily available and landmines strewn all over the place. In Ethiopia alone, it is estimated that there are over 1.5 million anti-personnel landmines, which continue to kill and maim innocent people, including women and children. In this connection, we attach great importance to the adoption by the recent Oslo Conference of the draft treaty on the ban on anti-personnel landmines. We appeal to those who remain outside the Ottawa process to sign the draft convention in December this year, so that it can be an effective instrument for getting rid of these deadly weapons.

As a founding Member of the United Nations, Ethiopia has always been unreserved in fulfilling its commitment to the Organization and in upholding the principles of its Charter. My country has also been a beneficiary of various programmes of the United Nations system. Accordingly, the increasing effectiveness of the Organization in all areas and the realization of universal peace and security are goals we cherish deeply.

I wish to conclude by expressing the hope that the United Nations and the international community will not miss the opportunities that have been created since the beginning of this decade for fostering effective international cooperation, eradicating poverty and realizing sustainable development in those regions of the world that have not yet achieved it.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, His Excellency the Honourable Alexander Downer.

Mr. Downer (Australia): Let me begin by congratulating Mr. Udovenko on his election as President of the General Assembly at this fifty-second session. The country and the Group he represents have seen great changes in the last decade. It therefore seems particularly

fitting that he is presiding over a General Assembly which will lay the foundation for significant changes to the United Nations itself — changes which must equip it better for the new and potentially more cooperative international environment in which we find ourselves.

It is thus not only right but necessary that reform is the major theme of the United Nations at present, and of this General Assembly in particular. We would like to thank the former President of the Assembly, Ambassador Razali, for the outstanding contribution he made to pursuing the reform agenda during his presidency, notably in his capacity as Chairman of the General Assembly Working Groups.

Today I want to concentrate on three issues in particular: reform of the United Nations; reorienting our approach to human rights so as to promote cooperation and institution building, creating durable structures to give substance to the goals set out in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments; and reconfiguring the traditional United Nations groups better to reflect the regional groupings of the contemporary world.

In dealing with reform, my purpose is to build a world for the next generation, and I am inspired by the hope and aspirations of the next generation.

In that context, I am pleased that we are joined in the General Assembly today by Mr. Perry Cross, a distinguished and courageous young Australian who is leading the fight against paralysis. He exemplifies the Australian belief that individuals with a will and a practical focus can make a difference in fighting barriers and reforming structures which are representative of an earlier era.

Australia wants to work with you, Sir, and with the Secretary-General and all Members of the United Nations, to ensure that by the end of this session of the General Assembly further, substantive progress has been made in the three critical areas of reform: financial reform and resolution of the crisis surrounding the United Nations budget and scale of assessments; reform of the Security Council; and reform of the Organization.

When I made my first statement to the Assembly last year, I stressed the need to move ahead urgently with reform and the reinvigoration of this important Organization, to ensure its future effectiveness and relevance. This year reform has been given real impetus by the new Secretary-General, whose appointment Australia warmly welcomed. Both in March and in July this year he announced significant organizational reforms aimed at the renewal of this body. I have enthusiastically supported these initiatives. We must now build on them.

We share the Secretary-General's conclusions about the shortcomings of the United Nations. The Organization's mission, as enshrined in the Charter, has been repeatedly reaffirmed and remains valid today. But the machinery and the working methods to pursue that mission need thorough review and revision. We agree that there is too much fragmentation of structures, too much rigidity within bodies and too much emphasis on bureaucracy and process.

I would like to highlight in particular the reforms suggested to the United Nations structure and to the Secretariat. The integration of 12 secretariats and entities into 5, and the proposed consolidation of five intergovernmental bodies into two are particularly welcome. They will help streamline and remove unnecessary bureaucratic structure and duplication from the Secretariat. It is an approach we commend also to the specialized agencies as Member nations seek to streamline and even merge some of these bodies.

Important steps are proposed in reforming the way the Secretariat works. We applaud the removal of 1,000 staff posts and the cutting of administrative costs by one third to which the Secretary-General has committed himself. We also wish to see all Secretariat staff move to fixed-term, renewable contracts to allow for greater employment flexibility in the Organization. We support the introduction of a merit-based promotion system and performance appraisal in the place of a system where seniority plays a disproportionate role. We also encourage management to improve training opportunities for junior as well as senior staff.

These reforms will not only make the United Nations work better, but also provide real savings. These savings will be available for programmes, programmes which benefit all of us, but especially support the developing Members of the United Nations. Thus it is a package which is in the interests of all, and deserves support from all. We believe the Assembly needs to provide broad endorsement of the package as a whole early in this session to allow the reform process to proceed, even if some details are negotiated subsequently.

But I acknowledge that for reform to succeed and for the United Nations to carry out its mandate adequate resources must be made available to run the Organization. Australia continues to meet all its financial obligations in full and on time and without conditions, and seeks the same commitment from all our fellow Members. We continue to believe that the negotiation of financial reforms would be facilitated by early settlement of all unpaid contributions. The adoption of a responsible negative- growth budget and a new scale of assessments which accurately reflects relative shares of national income and thus the principle of capacity to pay will also be key issues at this year's session. It is important that the result ensures the burden of supporting the Organization falls fairly on Member States.

Australia remains committed to an expanded, more representative and transparent Security Council, better able to tackle the challenges of the twenty-first century. It should include as permanent members important Powers able to make a major contribution to international peace and security, particularly at this time Japan and Germany. It should also include permanent seats for under-represented regions as well as additional non-permanent seats.

Middle Powers such as Australia have made a significant contribution to the United Nations since its foundation, notably in disarmament, development, peacekeeping and human rights. We are concerned that the interests of small and medium-sized countries not be forgotten in this exercise. In this context, and because of our long-standing historical concerns about the veto, we would like to see an expansion of the Council accompanied by a new understanding on the application of the veto. We would also support a review of any new arrangements after 10 years so that countries like Australia and all other members of the international community have a further opportunity to examine the size, composition and working methods of the Council.

I am optimistic about what can be achieved by the United Nations if we can bring about some essential reforms which would make the Organization function more efficiently and effectively. Let me mention one of the areas in which the United Nations has proven it can function effectively: as a forum and catalyst for international arms control and disarmament efforts.

In recent years we have witnessed several landmark developments in this field, notably the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. The General Assembly was the forum, one year ago, for the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and Australia is particularly proud to have been able to play a role in that historic event.

There are many challenges ahead as we work with, and through, the United Nations to reduce global stockpiles of conventional and non-conventional weapons and to make the world a safer and more humane place. Let me single out two. The immediate commencement and early conclusion of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty has repeatedly been identified by the international community as the next major goal for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament efforts, most recently by the parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty — which now has more members than the United Nations itself — at their first preparatory meeting for the sixth Review Conference in 2000.

The Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons also identified an agreement to cease the production of fissile material for nuclear explosive purposes as an important step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. Capping the amount of nuclear material available for nuclear weapons use by extending safeguards coverage over currently unsafeguarded, sensitive nuclear facilities would in itself be a significant achievement for international peace and security, quite apart from its significance as a step towards the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons.

As I said to the Committee on Disarmament in January this year, the achievement of a fissile material cut-off treaty is a priority objective for Australia, and I now commit Australia to redoubling its efforts to achieve a cut-off treaty at the earliest possible date. We must not allow ourselves to be put off by the obstacles that currently face the achievement of this goal.

The effective elimination of landmines as a weapon of war is another important task facing the United Nations collectively and its members individually. I have been gratified by the gains made to date, through the Ottawa process, through the Inhumane Weapons Convention, through national and regional measures and, perhaps most important, through enhanced contributions to demining and mine-victim assistance programmes to address the terrible human toll of anti-personnel landmines. We owe it to the victims of anti-personnel landmines to continue working through all avenues to achieve a real and lasting solution to the global landmines problem.

The elimination of landmines is one necessary step in creating a more humane world, a world where individual human rights can demand proper respect. But further measures need to be taken involving the establishment of durable national human rights institutions to advance the goals to which our international human rights treaty commitments aspire. We are encouraged by and support the proposal to integrate human rights issues more fully into a range of United Nations activities. In our view, the linkages between respect for human rights, good governance and sustainable development are important. The fact that all four Executive Committees established by the Secretary-General will take human rights issues into account in their deliberations should ensure that more effective coordination is possible across United Nations activities. We warmly welcome also the steps taken by the Secretary General to reform and reinvigorate the Secretariat's organizational structure to support human rights, particularly the consolidation of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Centre for Human Rights into a single office. His appointment of the former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, as High Commissioner for Human Rights is an excellent choice. We pledge ourselves to support her in her task.

Another important recent development at the international level has been the negotiation of a draft statute for an international criminal court. Australia is strongly committed to the early establishment of the court as a major human rights objective. We urge all nations to support by consensus the proposed resolution at this General Assembly calling for the convening of a diplomatic conference in June 1998 to finalize and adopt the statute of the court.

As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we pay tribute to the universal standards the Declaration has helped to establish. Let us never forget as well that the Declaration, along with the two International Covenants, and the whole body of treaty law and practice that has since developed, was reaffirmed by all nations at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993.

Australia is a nation committed to the advancement of human rights and regards human rights issues as integral to its diplomacy. However, the Australian Government does not want the important area of human rights to become an unproductive battleground or an environment for sloganeering. What we seek is results, not rhetoric, with the outcome being genuine improvements in human rights. The real basis for a sustained improvement in the quality of human rights needs to be through domestic reform founded on working institutions that guarantee participation and accountability. Reform of the institutions of civil governance must come from within. It is not something that can be imposed from outside, for if there is not the political will and the people with the knowledge and a commitment to making those institutions work, then they will simply founder. Almost all nations have dark moments in their history where abuses have occurred, where vigilance has failed. Abuses and corruption are most likely to disappear when there are institutions established to bring light into this darkness.

All too often, however, instead of working patiently to encourage and help others to build these institutions, countries have tended to address issues of human rights by criticism alone. There is no doubt that in the 52 years since the United Nations was established the world has witnessed many egregious and vile acts committed for the most inhumane of reasons, and deserving the strongest condemnation. However, the condemnatory approach alone has only limited practical value.

We need to recognize that in practical terms protecting human rights must primarily be done at the national level. The international human rights system, which we have worked hard to build, inevitably has a broad focus and a limited ability to assist States to implement agreed standards. Regional human rights mechanisms also have a role, and we should do what we can to encourage their establishment and strengthening, including in the Asia-Pacific. However, it is clear that the ability of each State effectively to protect human rights depends to a significant degree on the strength of its own institutions, including a representative legislature, an accountable executive and an independent judiciary. A vigorous civil society is another important element in creating a culture of human rights.

A critical element that has often been undervalued in the national implementation of human rights standards is the importance of effective institutions as a means to achieving good governance. It is this institution-based good governance that offers a real hope of eradicating the randomness and violence that can characterize systems where there is neither popular participation nor genuine accountability.

Good governance creates the environment in which civil and political rights are respected and protected. Good governance also promotes an environment for sound economic management and sustainable use of

resources to increase prosperity. These conditions are important to the protection of economic, social and cultural rights.

At the same time, the exercise of civil and political rights through participatory processes is essential to good governance because it helps ensure governmental accountability and effectiveness. The interlinkages are such that action in one area of human rights has a positive reinforcing effect on other dimensions of human rights, making all human rights indivisible. Accountability, participation and effective institutions are three fundamental principles necessary for the protection of human rights.

It is with all this in mind that Australia gives priority to institution building in the human rights field. One of the most significant developments in recent years has been the spread of national institutions for the promotion of human rights. Such institutions, able to work with Governments and civil society, can reflect to a significant degree the different cultures and local conditions of the societies in which they are established, while remaining consistent with international human rights standards. Moreover, it is worth noting that the General Assembly has endorsed a set of minimum standards for such institutions — the so-called Paris principles. Despite considerable early scepticism, recent experience has been very positive, and many Governments and non-governmental organizations are now looking positively at independent national institutions as an important means to promote and protect human rights. The generally positive view of the work of national institutions held by most States was reflected in the adoption by consensus of Australia's resolution on this subject at this year's session of the Commission on Human Rights, with an increased number of co-sponsors.

Developing countries are showing rapidly increasing interest in establishing or strengthening existing national human rights institutions, as a constructive way to take positive action at the national level, bearing in mind national circumstances, to promote respect for human rights. Important examples of human rights institutions recently established in my part of the world that are making a difference on the ground include those in India and Indonesia. I was encouraged recently by the statement of Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister that he intends to press ahead to establish a human rights commission in the near future.

We will also watch with expectation the development of the proposed Cambodian national human rights commission. A credible and independent human rights commission, along with a genuinely independent national electoral commission, could make an important contribution to protecting stability and promoting the observance of human rights in Cambodia in the lead-up to what we strongly hope will be free, fair and credible elections in May next year.

The work of national institutions in individual countries can be strengthened through subregional and regional arrangements which provide a framework for exchanges of views and experiences. Australia is a strong supporter of the development of such arrangements in the Asia-Pacific region. Since an inaugural meeting in Darwin in 1996 there has been a steady consolidation of links among established and emerging Asia-Pacific human rights commissions. The 1996 meeting saw the commissions of Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and India — later also joined by the Philippines — establish a regional network of human rights commissions, the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, with a supporting Secretariat based in and financed by Australia.

The aim of this network is to strengthen cooperation among national human rights institutions, including through information sharing, staff exchanges, technical cooperation and an annual regional meeting. It also assists other regional Governments wishing to establish such institutions. The most recent regional meeting has just been held, in New Delhi. It attracted participation from the founding human rights commissions as well as that of Sri Lanka. Other regional countries from Asia and the Pacific attended as observers, some of which are considering the establishment of their own human rights commissions.

A most effective area of United Nations operations in this field has been the work of the Special Adviser to the High Commissioner for Human Rights on National Institutions, Regional Arrangements and Preventive Strategies. The United Nations work with a number of Governments, including in our own region, is at an important stage. Australia was therefore pleased to provide additional financial support this year to enable the United Nations to continue to support national institutions.

We welcome the Secretary-General's commitment in his report on the work of the Organization to strengthening cooperation on issues of democratization and good governance. We note his comment that

> "This past year has seen a dramatic increase in activities relating to the establishment of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights." *(A/52/1, para. 30)*

We are heartened by this development and by the responsiveness of the Secretary-General. His report clearly reflects the need I am stressing here for support for national institution-building to be at the centre of United Nations human rights endeavours.

Earlier this year I announced the establishment in Australia of a Centre for Democratic Institutions. This Centre will be devoted to the provision of practical support for the consolidation and strengthening of democratic institutions in developing countries included in Australia's aid programme. It exemplifies a cooperative rather than a conflict approach towards promoting human rights, and it will be the flagship of our good governance initiatives. The focus of the Centre's training programmes will be on electoral, parliamentary, judicial and human rights institution-building and the processes by which broader society, notably the media and community groups, can contribute to democratic decision-making. It will also facilitate visits and secondments of appropriate participants, such as Parliamentarians, senior administrators and other influential persons to relevant Australian organizations.

While human rights remain at risk, our values are compromised and international stability is jeopardized. The protection of human rights to promote the dignity of the individual is too important a matter for symbolic gestures alone. It is only through the pursuit of practical and effective efforts to promote human rights that we show our real commitment to the welfare of individuals and society. And it is vital to such practical outcomes that we orient our approach to human rights to emphasize cooperation and the creation of durable structures.

If I may stay briefly with the subjects of practical outcomes and durable structures, the nations of the world are facing today the threat of climate change and will need to agree later this year in Kyoto on sustainable responses to that threat. At the recent South Pacific Forum, Australia, along with other Forum countries, acknowledged deep concern about the impact of increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases on rising sea levels and changing weather patterns, especially low-lying islands. Australia, along with others, is working hard to ensure that the Kyoto meeting delivers a sustainable environmental outcome. We stand ready to play our part, although, as we have made clear in these negotiations, we have no intention of imposing upon Australians an unfair and disproportionate cost in addressing this global problem.

Before concluding, I should like to address the third and final reform issue I said I would be raising. Australia believes there is an element missing in the present discussion on reform. I am referring to the existing electoral group system, which dates back to the last major reform of the group system in 1963. Since the size of the United Nations has nearly doubled since 1963, mostly with new nations from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, this issue needs to be addressed again.

The present configuration contains many conspicuous anomalies and inequities which constitute powerful arguments for reform. The substantial disparities in the size of the various groups and the inadequate level of representation available to the many subregions, including in our own geographic region of East Asia and the Pacific, has long been an evident source of frustration. Comparisons between the size of the African and East European Groups — embracing 53 and 21 members, respectively — demonstrate the legitimacy of dissatisfaction with the status quo in this regard.

This widespread sense of under-representation is exacerbated by the social and political diversity of the larger groups and the limited extent to which a single member can be said to represent the group as a whole. While we have our own ideas, Australia does not believe it would be helpful to prescribe any rigid formula for reconfiguration of the group system. We acknowledge this is a sensitive issue on which there are many views. But I believe it is time we began to think about and discuss this matter, as we seek to equip the United Nations for the future.

Ultimately, reform of the United Nations means one thing. It means a more efficient organization capable of delivering practical outcomes to the people of the world. If we are to achieve that reform, then we must focus on cooperation, not conflict. We must build institutions which will guarantee effective vigilance, and above all else we must have the courage to abandon the ideas and structures of the past and embrace the changes which bring the future.

Address by The Honourable Kenny D. Anthony, Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Planning, Information and the Public Service of Saint Lucia

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Planning, Information and the Public Service of Saint Lucia.

The Honourable Kenny D. Anthony, Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Planning, Information and the Public Service of Saint Lucia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Planning, Information and the Public Service of Saint Lucia, His Excellency The Honourable Kenny D. Anthony, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Anthony (Saint Lucia): My delegation welcomes the experience and expertise which Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko brings to the leadership of this session of the General Assembly, and would like to applaud his predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia, for his outstanding contribution during the fifty-first session.

We feel a quiet sense of elation that the Secretary-General has emerged as the personification of the new possibilities of the United Nations. His recent succession to the distinguished position of Secretary-General of this body is symbolic of the new vision and the new order which heralds our entry into the twenty-first century.

Our historical moment is a defining one. Change has brought us to the stage at which we can either transform or be transformed. All of us — large as well as small nations, individuals as well as Governments — are challenged to make a decisive break with the old ways of doing and seeing things. The people of our planet continue to yearn for justice, equality and fairness. The human spirit continues to thirst for all that is good and beautiful. The soul of humankind is still seeking to reinvent itself in ways that are noble, kind, compassionate and caring. That is the new wave that is beginning to swell on the cusp of the new millennium, and we can discern its gathering momentum in the emotive milestones of the past few months. The expression of universal public grief infused with private intensity over the deaths of Mother Teresa and Diana, Princess of Wales and the donation of $1 billion by Ted Turner to United Nations charitable causes — these are the affirmations of the emergent humanist temperament of the new age.

In these times, this body must welcome the inspiration of those who, by their example, generosity, selflessness and courage, seek to protect the defenceless in a bid to reshape the horizons of our common humanity. It is a global wave sweeping local shores as well as distant ones. In my own tropical corner of our global village, Saint Lucia, on 23 May 1997 the people elected a new Government with a decisive mandate predicated on a vision of hope, change and possibility.

The wave of people's aspirations at the national level is faced with its own counter-turbulence in the conduct of relations among States. Arrayed against this popular impulse for humanism in affairs of state is the assertion of all that has been selfish, greedy and exploitative. The powerful continue to parade their might without any regard for others. They exercise their influence without any compassion, and accumulate their wealth without any charity.

The icons of free trade, market liberalization and economic liberalism represent the hardening of the arteries of human conscience in the sphere of commerce. The movement away from concerns of social and economic justice to the preoccupation with market forces and economic rationality is leading inexorably to a new world order at odds with the impulse of the world's billions for a more caring and compassionate world.

At the level of the international system, we are witnessing a rolling back of the structures of social responsibility, the progressive erosion of the capacity to respond and the annihilation of the will to act humanely. We see the inability to care for the welfare of the people, the apathy towards their growing material deprivation and, most frighteningly, the calculated institutional insensitivity to the plight of the disadvantaged who wish to continue to earn with dignity and by the sweat of their brows.

There is no better example of this callous disregard than the situation facing the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, and in particular the banana producers of the Caribbean. Only last month, the small banana-producing countries of the Caribbean Community received a particularly harsh and crushing blow, when the appeals board of the World Trade Organization (WTO) upheld an earlier finding that the preferential treatment accorded in the European market to bananas of the

Member States of the ACP contravened World Trade Organization rules on free trade.

The intent behind the current move towards globalization as manifested in the World Trade Organization is evidently most commendable. Indeed, Saint Lucia was among the founding members of the WTO. We were led to believe that the World Trade Organization would help raise the living standards of our peoples and, by emulating the ideals of the United Nations, would promote fairness in world trade. It was our hope that it would end, once and for all, the law of the jungle as the dominant feature of international commercial relations. In short, it was hoped that the WTO would establish a standard of arbitration premised on fairness, civilized negotiation of vital interests and the inculcation of equity in international trade and commerce.

The WTO ruling on the European banana regime is nothing short of a capitulation to the machinations of those who are blinkered by free trade and sheer greed. We speak in these strong terms because the world community must understand that the WTO, and the complainants to the European banana regime, completely and steadfastly ignored the fact that the import of its ruling is the economic and social destruction of a number of small Member States of this body that together enjoy a miniscule 2.5 per cent of the world trade in bananas and only 5 per cent of the European market.

Consider for a moment the flaws in the process through which the WTO's dispute settlement body sought to resolve this issue. The initial panel did not have a single representative from a developing country, although the matter was of utmost importance to developing countries. To render fair play even more remote, the appellate board was chaired by an American, despite the fact that the principal complainant was the United States of America. While that may have been permissible under the rules, surely good sense and fairness should have dictated that it was nothing but highly improper and undesirable. But then, even the nature of the major complainant was improper: the United States of America does not produce a single banana for export. Yet, while it activated and participated in the proceedings, we, the banana-producing countries, were denied the right to full participation and were relegated to the sidelines as spectators.

The WTO has dismally failed to match up to the commendable goals which inspired its creation. The implementation of the ruling will bring about a generalized reduction in the living standards of our peoples and an acceleration of poverty.

Far from providing reassurance of a civilized approach to resolving world trade disputes, the ruling leaves a lingering suspicion that "might" will always be "right" and that the strong and powerful will always be able to use the system to achieve their own ends, regardless of the human dislocation and suffering that result.

If the World Trade Organization is to be of any value to us small, developing countries, there must be a fundamental reform of its system of dispute settlement. This is essential, because the implications of the scope of the ruling on bananas are not confined to bananas. The ruling raises questions about other import arrangements for agricultural goods as well as the future of trade and development cooperation agreements between rich and poor countries. The real challenge to the WTO is not how effective its Dispute Settlement Body can be in rigidly applying the letter of its regulations, but, rather, whether the process by which decisions are arrived at is perceived as being fair. The system must be reformed so that it takes account of the consequences of the implementation of its rulings. It must of necessity consider the impact of its decisions, particularly when, as in the case of the ruling on the banana regime, the affected countries have small, vulnerable and fragile economies.

Trade and development must, in the final analysis, be about the development of people. Therefore, the WTO criteria for settling disputes must be redesigned to take into account social, health, cultural and environmental issues. If national security issues can be raised as a reason why the law of one powerful country should not be brought before WTO jurisdiction, then why should the WTO not take into account the special social and economic circumstances of small, vulnerable countries in its dispute deliberations? What is the point of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body rigidly applying rules, when in so doing it takes decisions which are in direct contrast to the very principles which justify its existence? In such a situation the principles become worthless and the organization becomes amenable to manipulation.

We do not seek international charity for our banana farmers. We seek only fairness and opportunity. We are not irrevocably opposed to free trade, but we need fair trade. We are a proud people seeking to earn our living in as honest a manner as the wealth of nations permits.

The nations of the European Union entered into a partnership for development with us when, together, we signed the Lomé Convention. We call upon them not to cast aside their solemn commitments and obligations under that Convention, as they respond to those who want this most unfair ruling by the World Trade Organization implemented immediately and in its entirety. We are heartened by the statements made so far by the European Commission expressing the European Union's deep concern about the negative political, economic and social effects of the WTO ruling on a number of countries from the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States. We take comfort from the Commission's expression of its intention to take these factors into account, and to stand by the European Union's international obligations and the principles of its development policy. We also welcome the statements of support for Caribbean banana producers from the European Parliament and its call for the revision of the criteria used by the WTO in the resolution of trade disputes. We look forward to working with the European Union to find a formula which will allow us continued access to the banana market in a manner which will permit our farmers to continue earning a decent and dignified living. We urge the European Union to be steadfast in protecting the spirit and substance of its obligations under the Lomé Convention, to remain committed to ensuring development and equity in international economic relations, and to remain faithful to its ACP friends.

Such are the challenges confronting those who are small and weak, yet proud. It is within such a context of an uncertain international system that my country has to shape its foreign policy. The changing characteristics of the international system have necessitated that we redefine the boundaries of our alliances. We must look beyond the sea of uncertainty to the mountains of possibility. The contemporary confluence of forces challenges us to create new relationships to assist in our social and economic development. Having been forced out of our traditional partnerships, we must find new friends and reconstruct relationships. In this process, we must be guided by the imperative of finding and mobilizing new sources of investment that are predicated on creating new paths to sustainable growth.

For us, foreign policy is about building bridges to other people, other cultures and other markets. It is about contributing to the emergence of a new climate of tolerance and international understanding; it is about matching domestic need with international possibility. Consistent with these basic principles, Saint Lucia has proceeded in a direction in which the majority of the States of the world have already gone by establishing diplomatic links with the People's Republic of China.

Saint Lucia will always cherish the principles of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and the rule of international law. All countries, regardless of size, must have the comfort of these irrevocable principles and be secure in the confidence that the conduct of nations will be guided by them.

It is in the context of these basic principles that we urge the United States of America to re-examine some of its recent policies towards the States of the Caribbean. Its lead role in the challenge to our banana marketing regime has damaged our peoples' confidence in its declarations of friendship. Its new immigration laws are causing apprehension and dislocation for thousands of persons who originated from the Caribbean, and is eroding the bridges between our peoples. The imminent deportation of persons who have lived for decades in the United States will create a humanitarian problem of mass proportions. This is no longer a domestic matter. The consequences for the human rights of those affected have transformed it into a subject for international concern.

In addition, the deportation of persons who have become hardened criminals to lands they do not know as home is further rocking the social and economic fabric of our democracies. If there is a law of unintended consequences, the United States of America must accept the negative repercussions of its policies. It must therefore embark on corrective action to undo the damage which these policies have unleashed on the peoples of the Caribbean community.

It is our concern for fairness, equity and democratization in the conduct of international relations that has caused Saint Lucia to embrace and support the process of reform of the United Nations itself. Saint Lucia firmly believes that if the United Nations is to adequately address the challenges of the coming century, then three things must happen.

First, Member States must honour their financial obligations to the body. Saint Lucia continues to believe that the United Nations financial crisis can be alleviated if all Member States, large and small, rich and poor, do so in a timely manner, without conditions. A United Nations that is financially weak, that lurches from one budget crisis to another, is in no condition to confront and overcome the challenges facing mankind. If there is to be financial reform, then the precarious financial

existence of the United Nations must be consigned to the dustbin of history.

Secondly, the United Nations itself must take steps to become more efficient and effective. We need a United Nations where waste is abhorred, where the churning out of documents for documents' sake, at a cost of millions of dollars, is no longer a priority. We need a United Nations that is leaner, but more capable of making the maximum use of its resources.

Thirdly, the United Nations must become more responsive to the needs of all its Member States. For the majority of the United Nations Member States, the need is for sustainable development, for the eradication of poverty and of illiteracy. We need a United Nations that will show an even greater sensitivity to those needs.

The United Nations must also answer the call for wider representation of the world peoples on the Security Council. Saint Lucia wishes to reiterate its support for an increase in the membership of the Security Council to reflect the universal membership of the General Assembly and to ensure the balanced representation of the developing world.

Saint Lucia applauds the initiatives of the Secretary-General in his proposals to reform the United Nations to inspire greater confidence in its potential. Saint Lucia is particularly interested in the proposed "dividend for development", and welcomes the idea that a large portion of United Nations resources should be allocated to development, particularly to meet the needs of developing countries. It is our hope, however, that this proposed "dividend for development" will not become like the peace dividend — a noble idea that is yet to materialize.

It is a moral responsibility of those who are strong to protect the weak and vulnerable. The international community, through the United Nations, must accept its responsibility to establish and maintain mechanisms that will protect the small, vulnerable economies of this world as they seek to build sustainable economies for the twenty-first century.

Saint Lucia has begun to do its part through the diversification of its economic base, through action to reduce unemployment, poverty, population growth and to improve the educational standards of our peoples. We, too, want to be better placed to exploit the new employment opportunities provided by the revolution in information and communications technology. But the United Nations must also play its part by not forgetting that small island developing States like Saint Lucia have peculiar needs that it must be vigilant to protect.

We applaud the work being carried out by the Commonwealth on updating its report on the vulnerability of small States and in revising the Vulnerability Index of Small States, and we welcome the new report, "A Future for Small States Overcoming Vulnerability".

Saint Lucia notes the preparation being made for the special session of the General Assembly in 1999 to review outstanding chapters and issues of the Barbados Programme of Action. However, we must express our disappointment over the lack of progress in implementing the Programme of Action, and Saint Lucia urges the international community to support the mobilization of external resources to implement the plan.

In recent times, the vulnerability of small States to natural disasters could not have been more clearly demonstrated than in the case of the Caribbean island of Montserrat, whose very existence is threatened by an intermittently raging volcano. Since the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, the situation in Montserrat has deteriorated. Half of the island's population has had to flee. The plight of the people of Montserrat is a human tragedy that the world ignores because, once again, its setting is another small island State which seems to be in a remote corner of the international community. The people of Montserrat badly need sympathy, understanding and support.

The establishment of a Caribbean family of nations is a historical imperative for Saint Lucia. For this reason, we shall continue to strengthen the integration process in the Caribbean and the closer association of our peoples. We have a vision of the entire Caribbean Basin merging as one nation, becoming one family, irrespective of the division of language, size, trade and political traditions and relationships. We may be small, but we are making our contribution to the enhancement of civilization.

The noble ideals and goals of the United Nations and its Charter will be meaningless if the international community fails to protect small, vulnerable developing countries like Saint Lucia from the predatory actions of those who seek to destroy the livelihood of our peoples in the name of free trade. These lofty goals will be hollow if, in the rush to espouse globalization and the liberalization of trade, the special circumstances of the smaller, poorer States of this world are scorned, and

their special needs are bulldozed and smashed by the injustice of international tribunals and the myopia of richer States.

Saint Lucia does not wish to be trapped in a cycle of dependence. It merely wishes to be given the opportunity to be self-sustaining in this global order.

The noble aspirations of the United Nations will rank among the greatest failures of the twentieth century if, by failing to be involved in the control of the process of globalization, it allows its smaller, poorer Members to be marginalized. The goal of sustainable development must not be allowed to become yet another myth of our times.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I thank the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Planning, Information and the Public Service of Saint Lucia for the statement he has just made.

The Honourable Kenny D. Anthony, Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Planning, Information and the Public Service of Saint Lucia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Rwanda, His Excellency Mr. Anastase Gasana.

Mr. Gasana (Rwanda) (*interpretation from French*): Before delivering the message of the Government of Rwanda to the General Assembly, allow me to follow the Heads of State and fellow Ministers who have spoken from this rostrum and express to the President our very sincere congratulations on his outstanding election. We also pay a well-deserved tribute to his eminent predecessor, who displayed devotion, skill and readiness to serve during the last session.

Our warmest and fraternal congratulations also go to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for whom this session of the General Assembly is his first in that office.

At the fiftieth anniversary session of the United Nations we took the opportunity to express loudly and clearly our views with regard to the essential reforms to be carried out within the United Nations. We welcome the proposals made by the Secretary-General, and we assure him of our support and cooperation. We also made proposals on Security Council reform. We will continue to make our contribution and lend our support to the collective efforts aimed at ensuring greater democracy in the Council.

The Government of Rwanda also wishes to take this opportunity to express its great satisfaction at the appointment of Mrs. Mary Robinson as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We assure both her and the Secretary-General of our assistance and cooperation.

At this session the Government of Rwanda wishes to make its modest contribution to our consideration of some matters of concern both to Africa and to the entire international community. These primarily relate to the difficulties encountered in the process of bringing to life a new Africa and problems related to the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa. We shall also offer some thoughts on how our peoples may enjoy a relatively smooth passage into the next millennium. We will conclude with an appeal for international solidarity for Rwanda and the Rwandan people.

The hope of the peoples of Africa and the third world is first of all for an understanding of their real problems, and today that understanding must be a priority. Much of the international community supports the new political order in Africa and the new African leadership and leaders who wish to create new realities for a new Africa. We had the opportunity and pleasure, at the special meeting of the Security Council on Africa held on 25 September under the presidency of the Secretary of State of the United States, of hearing comments in support of the new African leadership. We stand firmly together. The others, those who do not trust in Africa and the Africans, who attempt to hinder our continent's efforts to free itself from neocolonialism and dictatorships, who are today trying to discredit and undermine our leaders at any cost, they are the ones we will obviously be forced to deal with when we come to them.

I should like now to speak of the problems of conflict prevention and conflict resolution in Africa and other third world countries. Again, we extend our warmest thanks to the Security Council for having taken the positive initiative of convening a ministerial-level meeting on Africa on 25 September.

Our contribution, beyond general considerations and some specific cases, will focus primarily on identifying the underlying causes of conflicts in Africa, conflicts

which in turn create the economic and political recessions of which we in our continent — and elsewhere in certain third world countries as well — are aware on almost a daily basis.

Africa and the third world in general are suffering from various ills, principal among which are ignorance, poverty, bad political leadership, *coups d'état* and foreign intervention. Those are the ills that have eaten away at Africa, continue to eat away at it and are the sources of every conflict on our continent.

Ignorance, it is said, is the root of all evils. Poverty is the cause of all misfortune. What United Nations programme will combat ignorance and poverty in Africa and the countries of the third world, and when will these two terrible ills that ravage our continent be cured?

Bad political leadership in Africa has led many countries to ruin and even led to the first genocide on the African continent, which occurred in Rwanda from April to July 1994. The United Nations was present with a military force of 2,500 men, who packed up and left, abandoning the Rwandan people to the mercy of the Interahamwe militiamen of the erstwhile single party and armed forces of the day. The planning and carrying out of the genocide was the ignoble act of a bad political leadership that viewed the ignorance and poverty of the peoples of Rwanda — and, consequently, of the peoples of Africa and the third world — as a political asset to consolidate and perpetuate its dictatorship in power or to usurp power.

We hope that the United Nations will support the new political order in Africa and its new leadership, and that it will oppose any manoeuvre aimed at using United Nations structures to nip in the bud the new political order that is emerging on our continent.

The conflicts of which we are all aware in Africa today are the bitter fruit of the famous so-called Africa of the Generals that emerged in the mid-1960s. Those *coups d'état* sapped Africa with all their attendant tragedies, of which all here are only too keenly aware. What are our strategies for fighting *coups d'état* in Africa today? What are the strategies of the United Nations for eradicating this scourge, whose effects are realized by its creators only when they themselves fall victim to it?

All of the *coups d'état* in Africa since 1965, whose rotten fruits we are harvesting today, were fomented by certain Western capitals in their own interests and to the detriment of the African people. Today, unfortunately, foreign manipulation is continuing in Africa, creating a new cycle of *coups d'état* in Africa.

We urge the United Nations resolutely to attack the five scourges I have just named, which still infect Africa and are the source of all the conflicts on our continent. These problems exist and we are familiar with them. Let us not make them taboo — let us talk about them within this prestigious building; let us talk about them in the Security Council. That, perhaps, would mark the beginning of improved conflict prevention and resolution in Africa.

We cannot close this chapter on African conflicts without referring specifically to some that worry us more than others. I am referring in particular to the Central African Republic, where we feel the United Nations should be on its toes and assist a country in which the keepers of the old order and their opportunistic acolytes are using violence against an elected Government. I am also referring to Congo (Brazzaville), where precisely the same scenario as in the Central African Republic is being played out on a scale far larger than in the latter country.

In our humble opinion, the United Nations should also send a clear and unambiguous message to the Comorians of the island of Anjouan that the Comoros is a State Member of the United Nations and that its unity and integrity are not negotiable. We ask the parties concerned to work with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to find an appropriate solution to their problem.

Western Sahara strikes a strong note of hope in the area of decolonization. We welcome and encourage the due implementation of the agreements that have just been signed between the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic and the Kingdom of Morocco to promote the process of self-determination and independence for the Saharan people.

In Somalia, the Government of the Rwandese Republic urges all the parties to the conflict to promote dialogue under the aegis of the OAU and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

Two years from the advent of the new millennium, we all have the ultimate duty of leading our peoples to the year 2000 without setback or fear of the unknown, unlike the people of the year 997 as they approached the eve of the second millennium.

The twentieth century, leading into the awaited third millennium, has deeded to us the two most horrendous genocides in the history of humanity: the genocide of the Jews during the Second World War and the genocide of the Rwandans in 1994. Will we cross the threshold of the third millennium with the same racist graffiti covering the walls of our cities and airport corridors? Will those with uneasy consciences continue forever to play dumb with regard to the Rwandan genocide, the very first in the history of our continent? Will religious fundamentalism thrive at the cost of human lives?

Extreme selfishness, despair, suicide, racism, crime, terrorism, drugs, paedophilia, battered women, rape: Are we going to bring all this luggage with us into the third millennium? What are we doing now? What are our strategies to eradicate all these evils? Resignation? Fatalism? Will the third millennium hold anything to shock us?

We all claim to govern on behalf of our respective peoples. What actions are we undertaking today to ensure that they advance calmly, smoothly, without panic or anxiety into the year 2000? If we do nothing, how will we explain it to them on the eve of 1 January 2000 or on the first day of the year 2000? Will we use the language of cynicism, pain, realism, politics, diplomacy or ritual — in just enough to get them off our backs and hustle them along into the year 2000 as into a lifeboat?

What strategies do the United Nations and its agencies, present throughout Africa and other countries of the third world, have to help the Governments and peoples that must confront the anxieties of passing from one century to another, one millennium to another? In my country, Rwanda, I see no sign of any such strategy, while the country is gripped by the many traumas born from the tearing, or rather the shredding, of the social fabric by the genocide of 1994. When the traumas of genocide are complemented by millennial anxieties, what is to become of such a people if it is not helped by increased international solidarity?

I have seen no or almost no sign of such solidarity in all my travels, no hint of such a project. Apparently, no one is concerned. And yet, we are only 26 months from 1 January 2000. Why such indifference from countries and from the United Nations? Should not our concerns be those of the peoples on whose behalf we govern? We should be one step ahead and thereby allay them.

Before closing, I wish to appeal to the General Assembly that the United Nations adopt a mini-Marshall Plan for the moral and physical rehabilitation and reconstruction of the first African country to have fallen victim to the catastrophe of genocide: Rwanda. This mini-Marshall Plan for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of post-genocide Rwanda was drafted by Ambassador Sahnoun, Special Representative for the Great Lakes region of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the OAU, at the request of the Rwandan Government of National Unity.

We also make a ringing appeal to the United Nations and the entire international community to provide Rwanda with substantial assistance, as it has received since November 1996 more than 1.4 million repatriated persons — one fifth of its population — who had fled to the former Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania and Burundi. Following this mass return of refugees, famine has today struck heavily in over four of our provinces. For the victims of this famine, we request emergency food relief and development assistance for every sector of national life — agriculture, health, education, the social and socio-economic reintegration of the repatriated, the survivors of genocide, justice and the rehabilitation and reconstruction of basic infrastructures, including those for water, electricity and roads.

As for the social and socio-economic reintegration of the repatriated, since November 1996 the Rwandan Government has been sending into the field teams led by two Ministers for each province and composed of other ministers, members of Parliament and high-level administrators. These field missions aim at supporting the local administrative authorities in their tasks of receiving and reintegrating the repatriates. The exercise has gone well and is still being successfully pursued.

At the communal and municipal level, we have also created reception committees composed of local authorities and members of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Unfortunately, some troublemakers have filtered in with the 1.4 million refugees who have recently returned to Rwanda. Since February 1997, these fugitives have been committing murders among the civilian population. They have primarily targeted the survivors of genocide, in order to do away with anyone who might be a witness in a court of law, and local authorities who are devoted to the cause of national unity and reconciliation.

The Rwandan Government has taken the necessary measures to ensure the safety of the people in the north of the country, which has been the site of these murders. Again, results in this area have also been quite satisfactory.

In fact, a month ago I organized a meeting of the entire diplomatic and consular community at Ruhengeri, one of the provinces in the north of the country. After that meeting the diplomats had the opportunity to visit any areas of Ruhengeri they chose.

Likewise, before I came to New York for the General Assembly, Mr. Pasteur Bizimungu, President of the Republic of Rwanda, headed a meeting of ministers at Gisenyi, one of the country's three northern provinces. After the meeting the President of the Republic and the members of the Government went into the field for three days. They visited and spoke with people from all sectors of the population, including peasants on communes and in municipalities and students and State officials who had been repatriated and who were participating in orientation seminars on the positive aspects of national unity, tolerance, reconciliation, respect for human life and solidarity. They also spoke with local authorities who are working to train our people.

The Government of Rwanda needs support for this exercise. It needs the assistance of the international community.

Before concluding, we would like to say from this lofty rostrum that we welcome the progress made towards resolving the misunderstanding on the question of the International Commission of Inquiry sent to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo announced at his press conference yesterday afternoon.

The Rwandan Government therefore encourages those specifically involved in this matter — namely, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo — to work together to put an end to this problem. They have our confidence and support.

In order to support the efforts of the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Refugees and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and to enlighten better the international community about the refugee problem in eastern Zaire, the Rwandan Government calls on the United Nations to publish and circulate as a document of the Security Council the report of the International Commission of Inquiry on the trafficking in and distribution of weapons in refugee camps in eastern Zaire.

The United Nations International Commission of Inquiry was established under Security Council resolution 1013 (1995) of 7 September 1995. The Commission submitted its report, duly signed by its members, one year later, on 28 October 1996. The embargo on this report, which has hindered its publication, should be lifted immediately in order to facilitate everyone's efforts.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.